

# Governor O'Malley Cautions Marylanders about July 4th Holiday Heat Wave

## State heat-related deaths rise to six for 2010

### *Heat-related Deaths Update\*\**

#### Department of Health & Mental Hygiene News Release

**BALTIMORE, MD (July 2, 2010)** - On the eve of a hot July 4<sup>th</sup> holiday weekend when temperatures could peak in the upper 90s, the Maryland Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (DHMH) announces another heat-related death. The latest reported hyperthermia fatality is an adult (19 to 64) who was found outside with no serious underlying health conditions from Montgomery County, bringing Maryland's heat-related death toll to six, matching the total for all of 2009.

"As we celebrate the birth of our great nation this holiday weekend, it's vital that we all take precautions against the high temperatures to protect ourselves, our families and our neighbors, especially our seniors," said Governor Martin O'Malley. "As part of our plans to enjoy this holiday with activities both indoors and out, please take some time to check in with neighbors who might need assistance as temperatures climb towards one-hundred degrees this weekend and in the days beyond."

The most recent fatality occurred in late May and was recently confirmed to be heat-related by the Maryland Office of the Chief Medical Examiner (OCME). All previously reported deaths involved seniors (65 and over) and were found indoors without air conditioning except one victim who was discovered outdoors. None of the six was homeless.

"Some preparation and a little common sense can help us protect our seniors, young children, and those who are overweight when the thermometer rises this holiday weekend," said DHMH Secretary John M. Colmers. "A few simple steps such as drinking plenty of water or fruit juice will help you avoid heatstroke and heat exhaustion. Remember, consuming alcohol in the hot summer sun has the opposite effect, increasing both dehydration and heat-related health risks. Chronic health conditions such as heart disease, diabetes, and respiratory illnesses also increase an individual's risk in hot weather. "

DHMH cautions Maryland citizens that heatstroke and heat exhaustion can develop from the hot and humid conditions typically associated with Maryland summers.

Heatstroke is a serious illness characterized by a body temperature greater than 105 degrees. Symptoms may include dry red skin, convulsions, disorientation, delirium and coma. Onset of heatstroke can be rapid: a person can go from feeling apparently well to a seriously ill condition within minutes. Treatment of heatstroke involves the rapid lowering of body temperature, using a cool bath or wet towels. A heatstroke victim should be kept in a cool area; emergency medical care should be obtained by dialing 911.

Heat exhaustion is a milder form of heatstroke that may develop due to a combination of several days with high temperatures and dehydration in an individual. Signs of heat exhaustion include extreme weakness, muscle cramps, nausea, or headache. Victims may also vomit or faint. Heat exhaustion is treated with plenty of liquids and rest in a cool, shaded area. Those on a low-sodium diet or with other health problems should contact a doctor.

#### **Hot weather tips:**

- Drink plenty of fluids such as water and fruit juices to prevent dehydration -- be aware that alcohol can impair the body's sweat mechanism, as can fairly common medications such as antihistamines and diuretics;
- Wear loose-fitting, lightweight, and light-colored clothes;
- Avoid direct sunlight by staying in the shade and by wearing sunscreen, a hat and sunglasses;
- When possible, stay in air-conditioned areas. If your home is not air-conditioned, consider a visit to a shopping mall or public library. Contact your local health department to see if there are any cooling centers in your area;
- NEVER leave pets or young children in a car, even with the windows cracked;
- Check on elderly relatives or neighbors at least daily; and
- Take it easy when outdoors. Athletes and those who work outdoors should, if possible, take short breaks when feeling fatigued. Schedule physical activity during the morning or evening when it is cooler.

In 2009, six heat-related deaths were reported; 2008 – 17 and in 2007 – 21.

To learn more about preventing heat related illness, visit: <http://spdev.dhmdh.gov:21115/SitePages/Home.aspx> and click on Seasonal Health Information or visit [www.mema.state.md.us](http://www.mema.state.md.us) and click on “Other Natural Disasters.”